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ABSTRACT

This report discusses many issues with which those who are implementing peer counseling programs will have to contend. Although it is recommended that peer counseling program implementors be aware of and know how they will deal with each of the issues prior to program implementation, the issues are presented according to their identifiable time sequences. The first section, Global Issues, focuses on legal and ethical issues, as well as on arguments for and against the use of the label "counselor" when describing peer counselors. The second section, Pre-training Stage, examines the issues of how to enlist support for a peer counseling program, assess needs, and delineate objectives. Peer counselor selection process issues are also considered. The third section, Training Stage, discusses issues related to the content and process of training, duration of training, and qualifications of trainers. Examples of training packages and widely used training manuals are included. The final section, Post-training Stage, examines the issues of tracking, supervision, peer duties, and special training topics. Each of the three training-related stages has its own evaluation component. Fifty references are included. Addresses for the National Peer Helpers' Association in the United States and for the Peer Counselling Project in Canada are appended. (NB)

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Peer Counseling: Implementation and Program Maintenance Issues

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This paper served as a basis for a workshop which the author co-led with Linda S. Moyer at the National Peer Helpers' Association Second Annual Conference held June 25-28, 1988 at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado

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PEER COUNSELING ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

There are many issues specific to peer counseling. The major purpose of this document is to discuss the many issues with which those who are implementing peer counseling programs will have to contend. As a framework both for discussion of relevant issues and suggestions for future inquiries, the author will identify issues in terms of stages into which a peer counseling program may be divided.

Introduction

A Framework for Inquiry

Although peer counseling program implementors should be aware of and know how they will deal with each of the issues prior to program implementation, the author has organized the issues according to their identifiable time sequences (see Table 1). The division of issues into representative stages is intended to give structure to discussion of the issues. Three stages represent the issues: pre-training, training and post-training. Due to issues they depict, these stages also have their own evaluation components.

Table 1: Program Issues

Global Issues		
1. The term, 'peer counselor'		
2. legal issues		
3. ethical issues		
Pre-Training Issues	**Training Issues**	**Post-Training Issues**
1. enlisting support	1. training content	1. tracking
2. needs assessment	2. training duration	2. supervision
3. stating objectives	3. training process	3. peer duties
4. selection processes	4. trainer qualifications	4. special training topics
5. evaluation	5. evaluation	5. evaluation

"The Pre-training Stage" includes needs assessment of the targeted group, advertising and promotion of peer counseling and selection of trainees and trainers. "The Training Stage" includes learning materials and supplies, teaching approaches, and the sessions themselves. "The Post-training Stage" includes practicum settings, peer counselor duties, supervision and consultation.

The first section, "Global Issues", will focus on legal and ethical

issues, as well as arguments for and against the use of the label 'counselor' when describing peer counselors. The remaining sections will describe peer counseling program implementation, maintenance and evaluation issues.

Global Issues

Labelling Peer Behaviors as Peer Counseling

Although Varenhorst (1984), for one, has advocated the use of the term 'peer counselor', there are many authors who are opposed to its use. For example, Myrick (1976) stated that "..the term 'peer counselor' is an unfortunate one that continues to appear in the literature and to be used in some guidance programs (p.2)." Anderson (1976) recalled an earlier article in which he and Erney took exception to the term 'counselor' being used to describe helping activities undertaken by young people. Anderson emphasized that the term 'facilitor', which he defined as "one who helps or assists" (p.19), is more appropriate.

Both Myrick's (1976) and Anderson's (1976) concerns rested with the term 'counselor' and its professional expectations, including training and duties. Both authors stated that, at least at the school level, students have not received the depth of training necessary to fully undertake a counseling relationship. One might expect, then, that, if a training program did undertake to focus on developmental issues, interpersonal relationships and communication skills, Myrick and Anderson would be more open to the term peer counselor being used.

However, Jacobs, Masson and Vass (1976), Myrick (1976) and Anderson (1976) have suggested another problem, namely a "misinterpretation of the concept" (Anderson, p.18). Anderson cited one case in which angry parents

eventually had a program stopped because they did not want their children to be 'counseled' by other children. Indeed, this was unfortunate. However, his example may more appropriately be used as an example of a situation where the practitioner neither educated nor involved interested parties in peer counseling concepts and activities.

Three somewhat different reasons have been articulated in Peavy's 1977 manual. Peavy avoided using the term counseling and substituted "helping" (p.8). He worried that, for too many people, counseling was an acceptable label for advice-giving. He also wanted to avoid the possible 'legal' connotation (as in counselor-at-law) and, even if perceived as 'psychological' help giver, he did not want to imply any professional status. He maintained that a help giver did not need to to be a professional expert in order to give support or to help another resolve a life issue.

Peavy, then, substituted 'helping' for 'counseling' and 'assistant' for 'counselor'. Helping, according to Peavy, reflects "..try(ing) to be of use to another person, to try to be of benefit or further the advancement of the other (p.8)." Similarly, the assistant is "..one who gives support and aid (p.8)." Peavy has used nontraditional terms to describe peer counseling activities and volunteers. The terms have been selected, in part, to minimize the effects of the more traditional labels, such as role attribution, status differences and dependency.

Carr (1981) recognized that there was concern over the professional connotations of the term 'counselor'. However, he suggested that more important than the label which one attached to the activities is the quality of those activities. He stated: "The importance is not in the title but in how the students relate to other students, and the way in which these

relationships can be used to enhance their development (pp.4-5)." In fact, the labelling issue may not be as important to Myrick, either. Bowman and Myrick (1980), under the heading, What's in a Name? , accepted that, at least for one program, the term 'peer counselor' seemed "appropriate and natural ... because the students were working closely with the school counselor on some special guidance projects. In addition, the students liked the title" (p.32).

Perhaps a useful approach to the labelling issue would be to adopt Varenhorst's (1984, p.717) behavioral definition of peer counseling and to accept that the term 'peer counselor' can be used interchangably with several other terms, such as peer helper, peer assistant, and peer facilitator. We must recognize that many program coordinators must overcome a great many obstacles in order to begin a program. If referring to their volunteers as 'counselors' is yet one more obstacle, better to change the label, gain recognition and credibility through the program's activities and re-educate opponents later, rather than lose the program before its had an opportunity to impact on its target group.

Ethical and Legal Issues

Although their presence may augment in-place counseling services, peer counselors, by definition, are not professionals. They are people "who provide supervised assistance to other (people) to help think through and reflect on concerns they might be experiencing" (Carr, 1981, p.3). Towards these activities, peer counselors are trained in caring for and communicating with those around them. As such, proponents of peer counseling must guard against 'professionalizing' peer counselors, that is, creating miniature mirror images of counseling and therapeutic

professionals. Peer counselors are intended to supplement, not supplant, professional activities.

At the same time, peer counseling trainers and supervisors must be aware of both the ethical and legal implications. To be certain, informal helping among peers occurs whether or not a helper has had training in counseling skills. However, once a professional helper organizes a group to become peer counselors, the onus is on the professional help giver to ensure that appropriate ethical guidelines, consistent with the professional organization, are understood and practiced. These guidelines will include competencies, training, confidentiality and supervision.

Carr (1988a) has suggested that a code of morality or code of friendship, rather than a code of ethics, would be more appropriate to peer counseling philosophies. A code of friendship would be "..an invitation to inititiate, build, open or develop a relationship". A code of friendship would articulate "..the informal, unstated, situational and variable, but known, practiced and strongly desired.." code upon which natural alliances are built. Therefore, a peer counseling trainer should be careful to ensure that the peer counselors' code represents peer counseling as a corollory of an informal helping approach, rather than a corollory of a formal helping approach.

Even so, Duncan (1976) has suggested that, ethically, "the helping professional is responsible for the welfare of persons participating in peer group work" (p.60), whether they are helpers or persons receiving help. This responsibility includes ensuring that peer counselors have appropriate skills to help their peers and that their peer's life issues are not too emotionally demanding for the peer counselor. In either case, the professional is responsible for consulting with other professionals should

assistance be needed.

These 'ethical' responsibilities also appear to be 'legal' responsibilities. Buchanan (1982) summarized legal implications, "liability increasingly may be found for damages caused by a counselor or the paraprofessional" (p.160), although greater fault will be assigned to the professional who has authority over the peer counselor. He wrote further that client-counselor confidentiality does not have merit in a court of law, at least, in the United States. Therefore, any information gained through a counseling relationship that might sustain any person's life or health must, by law, be reported. Buchanan completed his advice: "The professional should select, train, supervise, and evaluate volunteers carefully and should carry liability insurance for themselves and their volunteers" (p.160).

Pre-training Stage

The issues which must be addressed that pertain to pre-training are numerous and far-ranging. Issues such as enlisting support, assessing needs and delineating objectives are universally accepted by peer counseling practitioners. On the other hand, peer counselor selection process issues are more complex in that there are so many variables that must be considered.

Enlisting Support, Assessing Needs and Establishing Objectives

Although the above heading describes three separate issues, all of them are interdependent. In order to gain support for a given activity, an initiator must describe, not only the activity, but the potential consequences of the activity to all parties. In order to clearly articulate

positive consequences, an initiator should clarify with interested parties what they 'need' and, thereby establish 'objectives' that are clearly aligned to the needs of all parties.

A peer counseling program, to successfully establish itself, must gain support of its participants, including all decision makers and target groups to which its services will be directed. In a school setting, participants include peer counselor applicants, while the target group encompasses the school population, the applicants' peers. Decision makers include school administrators, such as principal, vice-principal(s), and heads-of-departments. Teachers, parents, and school district staff also make decisions, either school-oriented or child-oriented. In a senior citizens' activity centre, participants are the volunteers, though these volunteers are of retirement age. Their peers who use or are eligible to use the activity centre form the target group. Decision makers include the activity centre's staff and various volunteer committees.

In her article which described the implementation of a successful high school program, Varenhorst (1976) commented, "at every step of the way care was exercised to control for mistakes that would eliminate the program before it had been tried" (p.543). These steps included identifying the target groups and their individual needs, describing interventions, constructing a training curriculum and selection processes. Armed with this information, Varenhorst then approached the decision makers. This public relations campaign, she suggested, "is a vital step in starting such a program" (p.544).

Jacobs, Masson, and Vass (1976) listed the steps through which a peer counselor program initiator might move in order to maximize their program's success, if not chances of survival. They suggested that an initiator must

success, if not chances of survival. They suggested that an initiator must have adequate time and energy available. This implies that the approximate preparation (public relations, selection processes, and training preparation) times, as well as training and supervision times, must be projected. They emphasized that simplicity can mean survival. To ensure that an initiator has sufficient time and energy to look after all expected and unexpected variables, in the beginning, a program should remain small and simple. They cautioned that, when introducing a program idea to administration, an initiator could underline its simplicity, its benefits to participants and, of direct interest to administration, how the program is supportive of administrative needs.

Clearly, in a school environment, the principal remains the one most important decision maker (Anderson, 1976; Bowman & Myrick, 1980; Hoffman, 1976; Jacobs, Masson, & Vass, 1976). Anderson (1976) suggested that, on occasions where the elementary school principals were nonsupportive either due to misinformation or to their generally negative perceptions of peer counselors, programs have often been reduced or curtailed. Bowman & Myrick (1980) approached school principals first and then went for suggestions to supportive teachers prior to addressing all of the school's teachers.

The rationale underlying the implementation of more peer counseling programs which appears to have gained the most credibility is that of expanding or augmenting current counseling and support services (Carroll, 1973; Delworth, Moore, Millick, & Leone, 1974; Gumaer, 1976; Varenhorst, 1984). Varenhorst (1984) added other rationale: the utilization of peers specifically for issues which might be best handled by a peer support person, like developmental issues (aging, dating, effects of divorce) or specific personal issues (death and dying, grieving, substance dependency).

Other reasons included addressing the psychological and social needs of a peer group in their development and adjustment and generally adding to or creating a more positive work or leisure environment (p. 731).

These four rationale cover the needs and objectives specific to the environments in which peer counseling programs might surface. Perhaps decision-makers in a school might be aware of specific issues related to dating, sexuality, contraception or AIDS information. Loss and loneliness issues might surface in a retirement home or activities centre. However, a peer program advocate must be able to match the target group and environment with objectives that are compatible with peer counseling activities. Clear articulation of goals and objectives, when paralleling user needs, will promote a program's acceptance and facilitate later evaluation.

Selection

Downe, Altmann, and Nysetvold (1986) have suggested that "many peer counselor program coordinators have taken a rather cavalier attitude toward the identification and selection of prospective peer counselors in an elementary classroom (p.359)." Their accusations may well be generally applicable to researchers and practitioners involved with all age groups. Selection processes have been mentioned as brief sections of program description articles (Varenhorst, 1974; Schmitt & Furniss, 1975) or a variety of selection ingredients have been listed in 'cookbook' articles where the authors have provided recipes for the creation and maintenance of peer counselor programs (Delworth, Moore, Millick, & Leone, 1974; Jacobs, Masson, & Vass, 1976). However, only one survey which focused on selection processes and criteria has been reported (Carr, 1988b). A summary of the survey will add depth to the remainder of this section's review of the

literature.

The survey, which Carr and de Rosenroll mailed to program organizers, was returned by 60 % (417) respondents. The majority of programs described were school-based (elementary: 6%; junior secondary: 16%; senior secondary: 27%; junior-senior secondary: 33%), while the remainder represented college and university programs (9%) and community-based programs (9%). Just slightly more than half (53%) of the respondents perceived selection to be more important than other activities, such as training, supervision, and post-training placements.

When asked which student characteristics most influenced their selection of peer counselor candidates, the respondents indicated that the degree to which the applicant appeared emotionally healthy was most inportant (82%). Respondents also believed that applicants should represent one of the school subgroups (55%). They gave consideration to whether or not the training could benefit the candidate (54%) which, at least on the surface, appears to contradict their first criteria. Group leadership potential ranked as fourth (46%), while similarities to target groups and grade level or age were seen as being of similar importance (40%). Academic performance (16%) and involvement in other clubs or teams (5%) were perceived as being of little consequence.

The majority of respondents (60%) indicated that they had more applicants than they could use. The processes which they then used to select the peer counselors included a range of activities and judgments. Self-nomination (#1), along with interviews (#2) and trainer judgment (#3), were the three most frequently reported. Teacher nomination and timetable conflict (both #4) were the next most frequently reported. Letters of application (#5), parental permission (#6) and peer nominations (#7) were

also frequently indicated. Less frequently reported processes included character references and willingness to contract (both #8) and administrator recommendation (#9).

It appears that, in most cases, the successful applicants become the peer counseling supervisors' focus after selection. Unsuccessful applicants are either given feedback by interview (69%) or through letter (30%). While 31% of respondents reported encouraging unsuccessful candidates to become involved in similar activities, only 21% of respondents reported that they maintain contact with unsuccessful candidates. A large number (41%) of program coordinators indicated that they had no follow-up with the nonselected applicants.

Dooley (1980) defined several key words utilized when discussing selection. According to Dooley, selection "..includes all program activities that contribute to the identification and engagement of competent workers" (pp.242-243). Recruitment refers to a form of selection where anyone who applies is accepted. Screening, on the other hand, describes a process in which a wide range of criteria may be used to differentiate between individuals who, based on some criteria, may be designated as either having high or low skills acquisition and commitment potentials. Self-selection, whereby candidates themselves decide on their appropriateness during the pre-training stage, augments both recruitment and screening.

A review of peer counseling program description literature suggests a wide range of selection processes. On one extreme is recruitment (Edwards, 1976; Varenhorst, 1984), whereas other programs have stressed lengthy screening methods (Frisz, 1986; Lynn, 1986). Sociograms appear to be one screening method which several researchers have believed has promise

(McCann, 1975; Jacobs, Masson, & Vass, 1976; Downe, Altmann, & Nysetvold, 1986). One example of the use of sociometric techniques was when McCann (1975), while working with a grade six class, asked the children to write down the name of the person in the class that they would feel most willing to approach to discuss a problem. Having underlined the person's name, they were to write down their own name and submit the paper to McCann. McCann then tallied the 'votes' and constructed a sociogram where vectors pointed from the nominating students to the nominated students. Those who were recipients of the most votes (largest cluster of vectors) were identified as potential peer counselors.

Some programs have used communication scaling devices as screening tests (Delworth, Moore, Millick, & Leone, 1974). However, such devices have been criticized as having very poor predictive validity (Dooley, 1980). A number of programs have included grade point averages as a screening criterion (Frisz, 1986) even though other researchers, including Bergin and Soloman (1963) have found very little correlation between academic status and ability to learn communication skills. Still other researchers have relied, in part, on whether or not training would be therapeutic for the trainee (Bowman & Myrick, 1980). Certainly, there is little agreement as to what, if any, selection criteria should be used.

Three criteria which appear to have been utilized by many programs in selecting peer counselors include perceptions of the potential peer counselors' similarity to students with whom they might work, recommendation by key adults such as teachers, counselors, or principals, and psychometric assessments (Downe, Altman, & Nysetvold, 1986, p.359). These criteria may be used individually or collectively to increase their validity. However, Downe, Altman and Nysetvold have pointed out that none of the three criteria

can be assumed to be accurate selection tools for all situations. If, in fact, separately, the criteria prove ineffective as selection instruments, it does not logically follow that they will automatically improve their predictive validity when used concurrently.

It may be helpful to critically examine the three criteria as an approach to discussing general selection problems. In considering peer counselors' 'similarity' to the population with whom they will be working, several questions arise. Whose perceptions are being included in the 'aggregate' assessment of similarity? Are the peer counselors being asked to evaluate themselves? Are the various adult authority figures being involved? Is the target group being asked? Is there really any evidence to suggest that helpers who are perceived as more similar will be more effective in helping a peer than helpers who are less similar?

In distinguishing 'similarity', what criteria are being selected? Age, gender, socio-economic status, two-parent versus blended versus single parent (male or female) families, intelligence, interests, and race are all possible criteria. There is no clear evidence that any one of these criteria is more or less important than the others. In fact, Downe, Altman, and Nysetvold (1986) referred to Bachman's 1975 study in which grade one and two elementary school students indicated that similarity of helper, "..in terms of helper characteristics sought after by the children needing help" (p.359), was relatively unimportant. On the other hand, the cliquing of peer groups during junior and senior high school indicates that adolescents do react to perceived differences. Whether or not a peer counselor has the appropriate characteristics won't matter if the parties reject one another initially due to lack of perceived similarity.

Similar problems arise with the criteria when persons in authority in a

school or community group are asked to pick out potential peer counselors. Criteria for their recommendations might include grades, relationship with their peers, verbal abilities, 'normalcy' or 'abnormalcy', or popularity. These criteria can neither be clearly associated with one's ability to be helpful nor can they be considered to represent peer perceptions. Rather, the recommendations are based on the authority figures predicting that someone to whom they would go for help would also be a person that the targetted population would seek out. Perhaps, they are 'best guessing' but these 'guesstimates' should be accepted as such. It is probable that the selected individuals are 'peer' to the selectors rather than to the targetted population.

Downe, Altmann and Nysetvold (1986) stated that researchers have attempted to construct scales meant to measure the quality of facilitation. However, there are no scales currently available that have been standardized for all populations in all settings. In fact, even if there were such scales, in order to 'believe' that the scale has any value, one must assume all people have a static ability to be helpful to others that can not be changed through communication skills training and inter- and intra-personal awareness groups. Certainly, experience suggests that there are individuals who appear to be more or less helpful than others. Experience also allows that many apparently less helpful individuals can improve their skills and be effective and dedicated helpers.

In part, this and many other criteria become issues involving ethics and logistics. The peer counseling coordinator and trainers must decide to what degree all volunteers will be accepted and allowed to self-select for appropriateness.

On an ethical level, a part of the decision involves not 'falsely'

rejecting someone who could be suitably trained. Similarly, the coordinator must also decide whether the training is purely to give appropriate peer counseling skills to the trainees or whether there is a 'personal growth' component to the training that all who seek should not be denied. Conversely, if there are individuals who might gain from the personal growth aspects of training but are perceived as being poor peer counseling candidates, it would seem unethical to allow them to act as formal peer counselors and to work with others. Barocas (1973) suggested that the term, iatrogenic, usually used in a medical context, may be applied to other settings. Iatrogeny refers to an ailment caused by a 'helper's' intervention. In short, iatrogeny is helper-caused problems or issues experienced by client. Many of Roadblocks to Communication, suggested by Gordon (1970) might represent possible inappropriate interventions whereby a peer counselor could confound or worsen client issues. Certainly, iatrogeny is not exclusively a peer counseling issue. However, as peer counselors are being asked to augment a professional counseling system, we must also ensure that iatrogenic issues are minimized.

Logistically, the coordinator must consider the program's mandate. What are their responsibilities? If this is a new program which is attempting to prove itself worthwhile, can the coordinator chance accepting dysfunctional trainees? If time and trainers are limited, are they able to accept anyone and be open to many or most of them self-selecting out of the training which may, in turn, affect the training group dynamics and the post-training activities?

Giddan and Austin (1982) suggested that both training and post-training stages can be effected by selection processes. They suggested, though, that selection may be more effective if trainers select peer counselors from

trainees during and after training, rather than pre-selecting and then training a select few. They recognized that this process may increase numbers of trainees needed to be trained and further strain limited resources. However, this process may better ensure that few potential high level helpers are inappropriately screened out and only competent trainees are utilized as peer counselors. Those trainees who do not self-screen themselves out of a program and yet are not perceived as being ready to act as peer counselors can be utilized in other activities, such as peer tutoring, career planning aides (keeping career information up-to-date, helping with career-oriented computer programs), or selecting from several personal projects which the program coordinator might have available (helping at daycares or retirement homes, research projects, entering a support group or seeking counseling). Giddan and Austin, with their suggestions, have provided a logistically sound and ethically acceptable answer to a difficult question.

Training Stage

The Issues

The training stage includes all those activities selected peer counselors will undertake to prepare for their helper assignments. Issues during this stage focus on content and process of training, duration of training and qualifications of trainers.

As with many other issues with which a peer counseling implementor must deal, in part, the training stage issues can be resolved by answering another question. The question, 'for what reason(s) or purpose(s) are we undertaking this process?' focuses on the original needs assessment of the environment in which the peer counselors will work, the individuals with

whom they will work and the activities in which they will be expected to engage to meet the perceived needs.

Training Process

Peer counselor training has two purposes: communication skills acquisition and self-awareness promotion. On a skills level, trainees are typically trained in basic communications skills which include attending, basic and advanced empathic responses, appropriate probing and immediacy. Sessions are divided among lectures, group discussion and activities, such as role playing practice and relevant exercises. Many programs include values clarification, problem-solving, and decision-making.

Problem-solving and decision-making are typically presented as 'models' whose effectiveness are dependent on the degree to which a peer counselor uses basic communications skills. Concurrently, both are examples of peer counselor training's other purpose - trainee awareness. Carr (1981) wrote: "Peer counselling is a deliberate and systematic form of psychological education. It enables students to have the skills to implement their powerfully experienced valuing of autonomy and control. By focusing on the process of thinking, feeling and deciding, rather than evaluating specifically the content, it contributes to the most powerfully experienced need of adolescents: respect (p.4)."

Peer counselor training, therefore, offers skills and awareness so that trainees' natural communication skills are enhanced and augmented to enable them to be more effective when helping their peers. Peer counselor training is also a vehicle whereby peer counselors can become more conscious of their own day-to-day interactions and, through the experiential learning format of training, they can use peer counselor skills to gain more control and bring

about change in their own lives.

There are many manuals available to peer counselor trainers. Some of these manuals have acquired national prominence (Carr & Saunders, 1980; D'Augelli, Danish, Hauer & Conter, 1980; Ender, McCaffrey & Miller, 1979; Myrick & Bowman, 1981a, 1981b; Myrick & Erney, 1978, 1979; Tindall, 1986; Tindall & Gray, 1985, 1986; Varenhorst, 1980), while other manuals are only available on a regional basis or by special order (Cole, 1986; Cranshaw & Hughart, 1985; France, 1985). A survey of peer counseling manuals and courses suggests that, for each target group, there is a range of formats and exercises from which to choose depending on the program goals. The practitioner can choose to use only one or be selective and choose elements from each of the offerings.

In each of the programs, there appears to be room for lecture material (often referred to as 'lecturette'), as well as activities involving pen-and-paper questionnaires and personal inventories. However, the programs generally offer curricula that are directed toward the trainees being actively involved in the training process and learning materials. In fact, many exercises demand that participants, rather than the trainer, generate relevant material to be learned. In most cases, content is secondary to 'personal meaning' attached by students to subject matter. In a survey of twenty peer counseling program directors, Sachnoff (1984) reported that all twenty programs used some techniques whereby trainees learned through experience. "The most popular techniques were the kind that allowed students to be active participants in the learning process: learning-by-doing, hands-on experience, brainstorming, role-playing, and active dialogues and discussion." (p.41)

This experiential learning process has been advocated by Hunt (1987)

and Abbey, Hunt and Weiser (1985), based on Kolb's (1975) work. According to Hunt's model (1987), a full learning experience is represented by four completed stages. In peer counseling training, participants take part in an exercise (Direct Experience) or are helped to recall a past experience (Remembered Experience). The trainer then helps them to systematically break down aspects of the experience (Reflective Observation). Group members are then asked to make some personal statements, based on reflections of their experiences (Abstract Conceptualization). Finally, they are invited to discuss how they might use their new awarenesses, both as peer counselors and, more generally, in their ongoing lives (Active Experimentation).

"Think of a Secret" (Carr & Saunders, 1980, p.39), a training exercise the goal of which is to help students to become more aware of helping relationship characteristics, illustrates the process. Participants are asked to recall (R.E.) a secret that they have told no one or, at least, very few people. They are asked to imagine thoughts and feelings they might experience. Members are asked to write down a word or phrase to describe what it would take from the group to allow each participant to tell their secret (R.O.). The pieces of paper are collected by the leader who writes the contents on a chalk board. The group then discusses meaning of the words (A.C.) in terms of helping. Finally, participants are asked to look at the list and decide which characteristics describe them and which they need to strengthen to be a better helper (A.E.).

Examples of Training Packages

Examples of widely utilized manuals are authored by Varenhorst (1980) and Carr and Saunders (1980). Varenhorst's (1980) training manual,

Curriculum Guide for Student Peer Counseling Training, is widely used both in the United States and, to a lesser extent, Canada. In the manual, Varenhorst offers a series of fifteen tightly structured lessons plans. Basic skills such as starting a conversation with a stranger, listening and observing, and decision-making form the first seven chapters. There are eight other sessions which cover areas of special concern including family problems, peer relationships, drugs, health, sexual concerns, death and dying, communicating sensitive issues, referral resources and confidentiality. The sessions can be roughly divided into three components: introductory discussion of topic, exercise(s), and debriefing (de Rosenroll & Moyer, 1983).

The Peer Counselling Starter Kit (Carr & Saunders, 1980) is the most widely used program package in Canada. As its title might suggest, Carr and Saunders intended their manual to "...stimulate others to develop effective peer counselling programs (p.1)." The 'kit' is actually a manual which is divided into three components. The first section contains a series of questions and answers concerning peer counseling. The second section contains twelve teaching sessions, each running one and one-half hours. These sessions focus on skill building, values clarification, problem-solving and decision-making, referrals and ethics and are highly experiential.

A typical session begins with unfinished business from the last meeting followed by a 'warm-up exercise'. The trainer then introduces a new topic or suggests further training in a previously introduced skill. This section is typically divided into (1) lecturette, (2) practice and (3) debriefing. Each session ends with some form of closure exercise (de Rosenroll & Moyer, 1983). Although the Carr and Saunders manual is written primarily as a

training guide for working with adolescents, the manual's exercises and role play examples can easily be tailored to other age and needs groups, particularly when additional materials from other sources are utilized.

Duration of Training

There does not appear to be any standard for total training time needed to satisfactorily train peer counselors. Some programs rely on after school or work, evening or lunch-time meetings. Some of these training meetings are weekly, while other programs will undertake their training meetings daily for a block of time. Several programs report undertaking weekend retreats, either to train peer counselors or to augment basic training. Some school districts offer peer counseling as a part of their curriculum (Moyer, 1986) so that students can use a block of time in their course timetable to undertake training and practica or they may receive district-wide training (de Rosenroll, 1986).

Several factors are involved in decisions concerning length and depth of training of peer counseling groups. Logistically, peer counseling leaders must decide how much time they have available to train peer counselors or they must ensure that a trainer is available for the necessary length of time. Trainees must be polled to determine who can receive training at designated times. The variety of post-training duties undertaken by the peer counselors will have a direct relationship to the type, depth and duration of training. For example, if a peer counselor's main task is to act as an activity organizer for senior citizens, the type and duration of training will differ from a peer counselor whose task is to work primarily with survivors who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

Sachnoff, in his 1984 survey, did suggest that there was a consensus among peer training program directors that training, from their

perspectives, never ends. Rather, 80% of the directors believed that the initial training represents only the first phase of the total training program. Once in the field, peer counselors will need further training and support to ensure that their skills are being used and strengthened.

Sachnoff's report would seem consistent with two peer counseling tenets. Firstly, people naturally attempt to help one another with or without being trained as peer counselors. Therefore, when individuals volunteer to become peer counselors, they do not stop helping people who are part of their natural systems until such time as someone validates their abilities to help. Rather, they continue their natural helping processes and use the training process to enhance the helping relationship. In other words, peer counseling supervisors may be able to control for a peer counselors' readiness to work in a supervised formal setting, but they can not control for informal peer networks. Whether a peer counseling course involves four or forty hours of initial training, trainees will use course material right from hour one of day one.

Secondly, initial training can not hope to ready participants for any and all issues with which they may come into contact. Initial training would need to be far too long. Trainees are entering training motivated to learn to better help their peers. This motivation can quickly retire if classes become lengthy and 'heady'. Their motivation will be maintained, however, if they are able to practice learned skills in a practicum and in their informal relationships, as they continue to learn new skills in group meetings. Trainers also run the risk of creating yet another academic experience for peer counselors if training focuses too heavily on information-sharing and special issues prior to the need for further or specific information arising from students' practicum experiences.

Qualifications of Trainers

While, in the United States, there do not appear to be any nation-wide standards set, as yet, in terms of trainer qualifications, there are acknowledged experts, such as Bowman, Erney, Myrick, Sachnoff, Tindall and Varenhorst, who continue to write and give workshops for prospective and journeymen trainers. Several programs (Carr & Saunders, 1980; Myrick & Erney, 1979; Varenhorst, 1980) provide training on request to prospective trainers. Information contained in expert writings and workshops focuses on two general areas: course content and process and program implementation issues.

In Canada, the acknowledged training and research centre for peer counseling is at the University of Victoria in British Columbia where the Peer Counselling Project is housed. The Peer Counselling Project offers both on- and off-campus courses for trainers where, as in the United States, the participants focus on course content and process, as well as issues surrounding program implementation. The Project publishes a regular newsletter and consults with peer groups across Canada.

The Peer Counselling Project has implemented a formal Peer Counselling Trainers Certification process whereby trainers can receive certification to verify their level of training skills acquisition. The certification process includes three competency levels. Each level has four learning components: knowledge of peer counseling literature; knowledge of communication skills acquisition; knowledge of group processes; and knowledge of program implementation. The basic level or 'Introductory' level describes individuals who have a basic understanding of all four components but have not been able to effectively demonstrate their

competancy in all areas. At the second level or 'trainer' level, these individuals have successfully demonstrated their knowledge and competancy in all areas by implementing their own programs. The third level or 'Trainer-Consultant' level suggests that individuals have enough knowledge and experience in all four areas to be able to train trainers and act as consultants to peer counseling groups.

According to the Peer Counselling Project's certification competency levels, then, competent trainers will have working knowledge of peer counseling literature and issues pertaining to target groups with whom they will be working. These individuals will also understand communications skills to a degree that they can effectively model and teach basic skills which they will expect their trainees to acquire. These trainers must have basic knowledge in group processes. Peer counseling training groups are concurrently personal growth groups and task-learning groups. Effective instructors must be able to understand dynamics of both kinds of groups and react appropriately to each group's needs. Finally, to ensure maximum program potential, trainers must be aware of program implementation issues in terms of their own programs.

Varenhorst (1984) appeared to share similar views to her Canadian colleagues. She asserted that "a trainer...has to be skilled in group dynamics, capable of giving clear instructions and explanations, and able to convert experience and practice into constructive learning" (p.728). She, too, called for more systematic training and even suggested that changes to graduate preparation criteria may be necessary to maximize effectiveness of peer counseling leaders.

Post-training Stage

The post-training stage represents those activities which are undertaken by the trainees after and, sometimes, during their initial training. The post-training stage is, on one level, a series of outcome activities to which the peer counseling program participants have been directing their energies since the initial planning stages of the program. The final stage also represents cummulative effects of preceding stages and the degree to which a peer counseling director has dealt with issues represented by those stages.

Evaluation of various program elements has taken place during previous stages and, most certainly, forms a part of post-training activities. The post-training stage represents a transition between current and future programs whereby evaluation information is collected, analyzed and changes are implemented. If meaningful questions have been asked preceding each stage and appropriate data collection methods have been used, transition can be smooth and enlightening. It is at this stage that the interconnection of all stages and, in fact, between 'program years' becomes apparent.

Activities which align themselves to the post-training stage primarily reflect maintenance issues. These activities include those tracking and supervision activities that will ensure that peer counselors receive adequate feedback and guidance in performing their duties. Ethical issues, in their affects on peer counselors and their clients, are most immediate during post-training, though these issues will have been addressed with peer counselors during training. Special training topics can be included under maintenance. Peer counselor activities which may or may not constitute duties to be performed by peer counselors form yet another issue. Decisions concerning specialized topics may involve philosophical issues surrounding

implications of 'horizontal' versus 'vertical' helping interactions. Although there is definite overlap with several maintenance issues, peer counselor directors must also separately address the issue of program enhancement.

Maintenance and Enhancement

These activities form a bridge which connects the current cycle to the next peer counseling training cycle. During the post-training stage, formative evaluation activities which have been undertaken and monitored throughout the process can be furthered so that changes can be applied to the next process. New selection procedures, training ideas and post-training activities may be included, based on evaluation. Goals that were met may be intensified or new goals may be added to strengthen the program. Unmet goals may need to be reworded or reworked, reduced or omitted. New activities may surface to meet these goals more effectively.

In order to ensure that a peer counseling program will be maintained and enhanced, a strong support group must be established. Individuals who have been involved in the first peer counseling training cycle may wish to continue their involvement in the next cycle. Organizational administrators and staff and, if school-based, parents may be more actively supportive. Peer counselors may want to take on new support roles, such as helping in selection, co-training or serving on a support board. All of these individuals may be better informed and more supportive of peer counselimg so that they, in turn, can more effectively act as advocates for the program.

If the program implementor, alone, acts as coordinator, trainer and sole supporter of a peer counseling program, the program will be directly

dependent upon that person's physical presence, commitment and energy. Once that one person leaves, changes focus or loses energy, the program is much less likely to survive than if a 'team' has been formed to ensure continuity and mutual support.

If the team is comprised of representatives from various populations who are, on some level, directly or indirectly involved with the program or potential 'clients', populations from which the team members are chosen may be more tolerant or positively disposed to the peer counseling project. Conversely, when interest groups perceive that they have been excluded, some of them may choose to ignore, passively resist or actively block the project. They may sense that the project is irrelevant or in direct opposition to their needs.

In a school setting, a counselor is often perceived by teachers and students as being different in role and purpose. Just as selecting a heterogeneous peer counseling group may maximize the number of different client groups who are reached and generate more school-wide interest, soliciting organizational assistance and moral support from a wide range of interested parties can serve as a validation of the program to the school population. For example, selecting administration and teacher representation from various departments may suggest that peer counseling activities are not, in fact, disconnected from the academic community, but have a role in helping to meet the school community's needs, whether those needs are labelled as academic or non-academic. Similarly, parent and community support and active representation may further validate the program's current and potential impact.

Including the various needs of all of a target community's interest groups into a peer counseling program's goals is fundamental to a program's

preservation and growth. In the pre-training stage, needs of various groups are assessed. During training, trainees are trained according to specific needs-based goals of the community. During the post-training stage, peer counselors undertake activities that are perceived as being relevant to program goals and community needs. These components must be connected and articulated. Peer counseling activities must be emphasized in terms of community needs.

Suggesting that peer counseling is effective is not enough. Documentation and evaluations of peer counseling activities within the community are essential. The community must be included in these process evaluations and discussions whereby evaluation information is disseminated and new goals and activities are generated.

As with any other innovation, participants must readily observe their needs being met through direct involvement or they must be provided with suitable documentation of the program's effectiveness in terms of their needs. If participants recognize authors of the evaluation-based information as colleagues, they may be more receptive to its content and its relevance to them. Therefore, having a committee which is comprised of representatives from community groups will strengthen the potential that this dialogue is productive.

Peer Counseling Duties

The colloquial expression, 'all dressed up and nowhere to go' might describe peer counselors' feelings, which range from disappointment to frustration, when they report a perceived discrepancy between reasons for their training and their post-training experience. These trainees have been selected and trained to work with their peers while, in fact, their main

responsibilities often center around office maintenance tasks with little or no formal contact with their peers.

This apparent misuse of human power may be the result of the program coordinator's lack of preparation for post-training experiences. More often than not, the coordinator is attempting to add his peer counseling duties to an already awesome timetable. The coordinator has concentrated on selecting and training peer counselors and has not given enough thought to logistics of peer counselor utilization and skill maintenance.

The post-training placement issue is really two-fold. On one hand, a peer counseling program is in existence to respond to the perceived needs of a particular group or several sub-groups. Yet, each trainee will have experienced the psycho-educational component of the training in a somewhat unique way and, as a result, may want or need a personalized practicum setting. In line with individualized practica, Crosson-Johnson (1976) suggested that the trainer and trainee should meet at the end of the training sessions to evaluate the trainee's progress during training and to identify suitable post-training experiences.

In order to effectively discuss possible post-training placements and to ensure a minimum of time lag between training and post-training, arrangements with potential peer counseling environments and activities should have been done prior to evaluation meetings. Although the peer counseling coordinator can not predict all necessary placements, creating roles and activities based on program goals will alleviate the pressure of having to find last minute placements for a majority of trainees. The coordinator can then concentrate on trainees with unique post-training needs. This discussion is linked to pre-training selection in that, if students are screened with specific peer counseling duties in mind, fewer

placements will be needed than if students are allowed to self-select.

Another post-training issue concerns the inappropriate use of peer counselors during post-training. Too often, peer counselors become administrative assistants to the peer counseling coordinator rather than working directly with their peers. School-based peer counseling programs are particularly susceptible to this problem. Some school counselors, already feeling pressured by their personal and career counseling demands, as well as many administrative tasks, may experience a peer counseling program as yet one more responsibility through which their time and energies will be further divided. Yet, peer counselors are bright and capable. They are eager to get involved and want to feel helpful.

A typical school counselor's responsibilities include a large number of tasks which many peer counselors could undertake. Some of the duties, such as greeting people who are waiting in the counseling alcove, meeting with new students, helping students organize course timetables, and taking parents on tours of the school involve people and can be perceived as being connected to the students' peer counseling training. Often, though, the tasks do not involve people. The tasks are neither related to the training stage nor the natural helping skills upon which peer counseling allegedly builds.

Of course, the temptations to the school counselors are obvious. Tasks, such as filing, keeping the counseling alcove tidy, typing and computer work, sealing envelopes and keeping the coffee fresh and the mugs clean are clearly duties that need to be performed by someone. Peer counselors are quite capable of these kinds of maintenance tasks. Through peer counselors adopting these responsibilities, school counselors can focus more on other areas. Concurrently, the peer counselors experience some of

the more hum-drum activities that are a part of a counselor's routine.

A balance of duties needs to be reached, whereby the peer counselors can build on their training experiences and their natural helping skills, as well as help with the necessary, but menial, tasks. In this way, time which peer counselors spend on maintenance tasks could be bartered for time in which the school counselor directly works with the peer counselors. However, when peer counselors concentrate a disproportionate amount of their time on maintenance duties, exploitation concerns magnify. The school counselor may need to question the degree to which these activities actually connect with the peer counseling program goals and, through the goals, the school's needs as assessed in the pre-training stage.

'Horizontal' vs. 'Vertical' Help Giving

Egan (1986) discussed the counseling partnership as a team where, together, the counselor and client can work on the client's issue. Implicit in this relationship is a perceived equality, whereby the participants acknowledge that, whatever their educational, social or experiential differences, they are 'equal' in this human interaction. It is not enough that a counselor views a client as being an equal or 'peer'. A client, given his role and perceived status, must also recognize this equality.

In order for a helping situation to be horizontal, both parties must perceive it as such. In this way, in order to form a horizontal helping relationship, the perception must be interactive and consensual. Otherwise, by default, the relationship is 'vertical', that is, the helper is perceived by one or both parties as being different, usually of superior status.

Peer counseling, by its very label, implies that both parties have implicitly agreed that they have equal status and the relationship, then, is

horizontal. This is fundamental to the relationship. That the peer counselor and peer counseling coordinator perceive the relationship as being one between peers is not sufficient. The client must similarly agree to the 'peerness' of the relationship.

When stated in terms of peer counseling, the differences between vertical and horizontal helping relationships are more than semantic. One of the premises upon which peer counseling is built is that, through training, natural helping interactions are enhanced. Peer counseling training, then, validates, formalizes and positively affects those informal activities that are already taking place. If this is an accurate representation of peer counseling, when choosing post-training placements for trained peer counselors, the relationship between the placement and the peer counselor's experience in his 'pre-training environment' should be apparent.

Horizontal relationships, in a peer counseling context, are most clearly those where participants are of similar ages and share some similar life experiences. Where commonalities become less obvious are where the participants are from different generations or life experiences. Applying the label, 'peer counseling', may be appropriate in a situation where high school seniors, acting as peer counselors, work with grade 8 students in their transition between middle school and high school, if both groups view one another as 'peers'. On the other hand, high school students who have positive social and educational life experiences, may not perceive rehabilitation school students as 'peers' nor would they necessarily be seen by those students as peers. The relationship between both parties may be positive and productive. However, the relationship may more clearly fall within a paraprofessional framework in that a difference in status may be

inferred from the differing life experiences.

Conclusions

Implementation and maintenance issues can be significant roadblocks to a program's conception, birth and survival. However, if the implementors can be alerted to the issues so that they can react to them before beginning their programs, their programs' survival chances are greatly increased.

There are innumerable resources available to help and give guidance in implementing, maintaining and enhancing programs. Through organizations such as the National Peer Helpers' Association in the United States and the Peer Counselling Project in Canada (see Appendix), these programing and human resources are more accessible than ever before. However, it remains the program implementor's responsibility to seek out advice from the experts, as well as to consult with one another and to use one another's insights to avoid the pitfalls and to explore new options.

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